Interpersonal communication pattern of farmers through key communicators regarding some selected Gram Panchayat activities

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INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION PATTERN OF FARMERS THROUGH KEY COMMUNICATORS REGARDING SOME SELECTED GRAM PANCHAYAT ACTIVITIES

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ABSTRACT

Devolution of power to the grassroot organisations has increasingly been supported in recent years within the context of participatory development. The role of interpersonal communication to actualise such development has also become an area of fresh enquiry. To explore the pattern of interpersonal communication regarding the functioning of panchayati raj institutions (PRI), hence, was taken up for the present study. Key communicator network of farmers was studied as neighbourhood, friendship and discussion group pattern to explore farmers' interpersonal communication pattern regarding PRI activities. Sociometric technique was employed to identify the key communicators and their networks. Neighbourhood pattern of interaction showed least dense key communicator network and least dependence of farmers on these key communicators for securing information. Friendship pattern of interaction featured higher number of respondents seeking information from more than one key communicator; whereas, discussion group pattern of interaction showed least number of key communicators and highest inter-key communicator interaction. These networks can be fruitfully used to identify and facilitate information flow regarding PRI functioning; at the same time capacity building of key communicators can contribute towards the smooth functioning of these grassroot organisations.

Key words: panchayati raj institutions, interpersonal communication, key communicator, key communicator network

INTRODUCTION

There has been an overwhelming enthusiasm and widespread experimentation with decentralisation in India in recent years. The post-independence era has witnessed the changing approaches of legislators and flimsy attitude of political parties from the setting up of study team under Balvantray G. Mehta in 1957 to the enactment of Constitution Act 1992 (73rd amendment). But never before the enactment of the Extension Act, 1996, were the Panchayat bodies so much democratic and participatory and giving rise to more emphasis on devolution of power rather than delegation of power.

Now, the successful actualisation of grass root organisations like panchayat depends largely on the communication process among the individuals in a community which is mostly interpersonal, informal and day-to-day in nature. In spite of India's 'great leap forward' rhetoric of information technology, interpersonal communication continues to account for the highest proportion of information sharing process in terms of magnitude and effectiveness. For the farmers in particular, living largely in isolated rural settings, although mass media is important in disseminating ideas, interpersonal communication plays crucial role in making decisions regarding their farming activities (Sahar, 1977). At the same time farmers depend on various livelihoods activities to support their subsistence in most of the developing countries. Hence, to cater the need of the farmers it is necessary to resort to appropriate channels of communication so that innovations of farming, health and sanitation, education etc (See Siviah (1978) for categories of functions performed by local self-government) provided by the Panchayati Raj Institutions can effectively reach its receivers. For this cause an understanding of farmers'

communication pattern and identification of some important actors in the path of information flow is of special interest.

Although, literatures on interpersonal communication against adoption of innovations and media studies are legion (Some important works can be found from Singh *et al*., 1971 (key communicator); Mathur *et al*., 1974; Hossain *et al*., 1991 (communication pattern and socio-economic status); Bhaskaran and Rao, 1985 (correlates of communication behaviour); Mangla, 1995 (interpersonal communication and kinship system)), there has been little research conducted on interpersonal communication pattern regarding grass root organisational activities.

Keeping this reality at the backdrop one of the objectives of the study was to study the interpersonal communication pattern of the farmers as (a) friendship pattern, (b) neighbourhood pattern and (c) discussion group pattern. **Neighbourhood pattern** has been operationalised as exchange of information, ideas, opinions etc. occurring among the relatives and fellow individuals having either homogeneous or heterogeneous socio-personal attributes within the local social system/boundary on concerned issues and problems. When such exchange occurred among peers it was thought to be as **friend ship pattern** and when took place among members of informal or formal, regular and irregular groups it was coceptualised as **discussion group pattern** of interaction.

The selected gram panchayat activities, against which communication pattern was studied, included agriculture, health and education.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted at Payaradanga Gram Panchayat of Ranaghat-I Block of Nadia district, West Bengal, India during the year 2001-2002.

Multistage random sampling technique was employed for the selection of District, Block and Gram Panchayat. Electoral booth was selected purposively which included a social village completely and was predominantly inhabited by the farming community. A total of 100 farmers were selected as a sample for the study.

Sociometric technique was followed to identify the key communicators. The respondents were asked to indicate their choices (necessarily within the social village) from whom they received information regarding gram panchayat activities. Respondents were allowed to make unlimited choices without any specification of ordering. The data collected was, hence, binary in nature (individuals receiving choice – 1 and not receiving choice – 0). The choices were also directed in nature, i.e. seeking information and providing information were distinguished. The number of received choices by the respondents was then ranked. The respondents of the upper quartile were considered as the key communicator for the study (support can be found for such classification in Lindzey and Byrne, 1968).

The data collected for the sociometric study was analysed by the software Ucinet 6 for Windows (Borgatti *et al*., 2002). The Netdraw Visualization Program was used for the identification of communication networks. Care was taken to minimise the number of crossed lines in the diagram for easy comprehension. The following path was used for network drawing – File>Open> Ucinet dataset> Network. The egonet option was used for the representation of the diagram with subsequent adjustment for representation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

Findings from the analysis of data have been presented in the form of three network diagram around key communicators corresponding to the three communication pattern mentioned earlier.

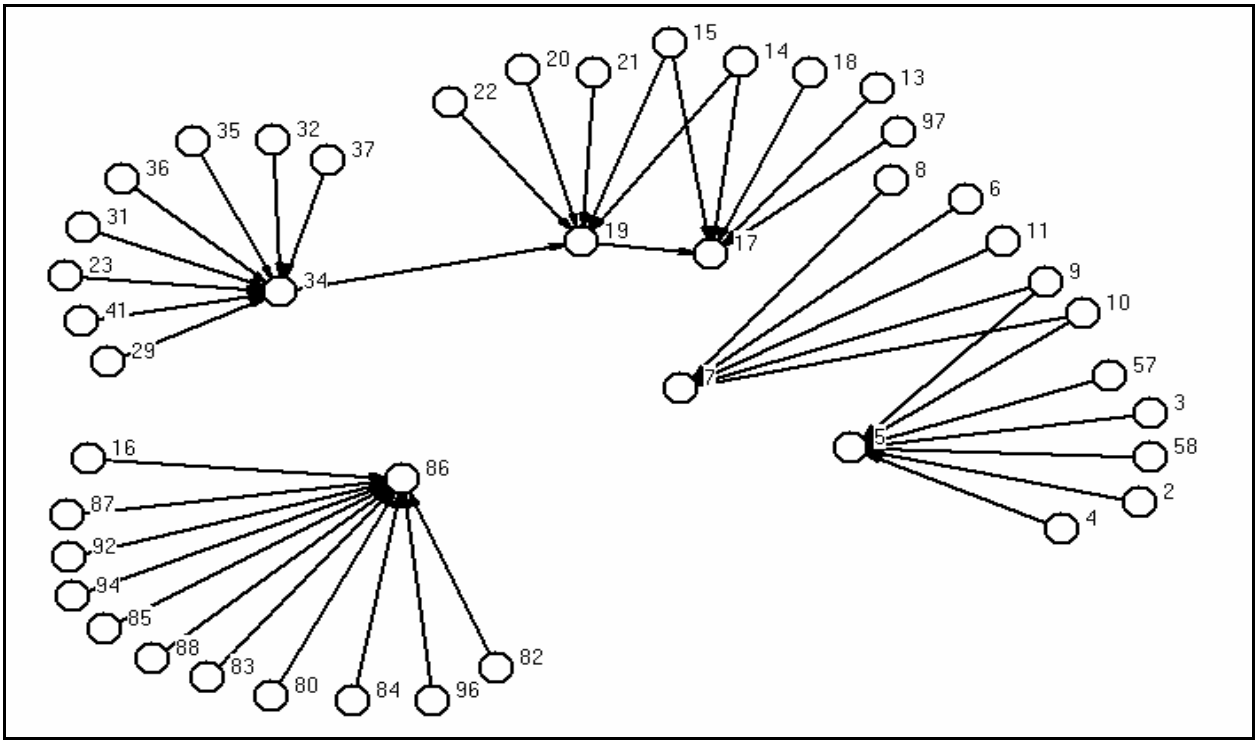

Figure 1. Interaction through key communicators: The neighbourhood pattern

As the neighbourhood pattern of interaction is very much spatially influenced the number of choices received by key communicators has not been very high especially in comparison to friendship and discussion group patterns. Still, the key communicators can be easily distinguished from the rest. The interaction pattern is less dense and centres round these key communicators. The settlement pattern of the community can be anticipated from Figure 1 by following the subgroups of respondents around key communicators. The separate blocks under the influence of key communicators and the individuals acting as the bridge (liaison) between such blocks are of special interest and can be addressed separately.

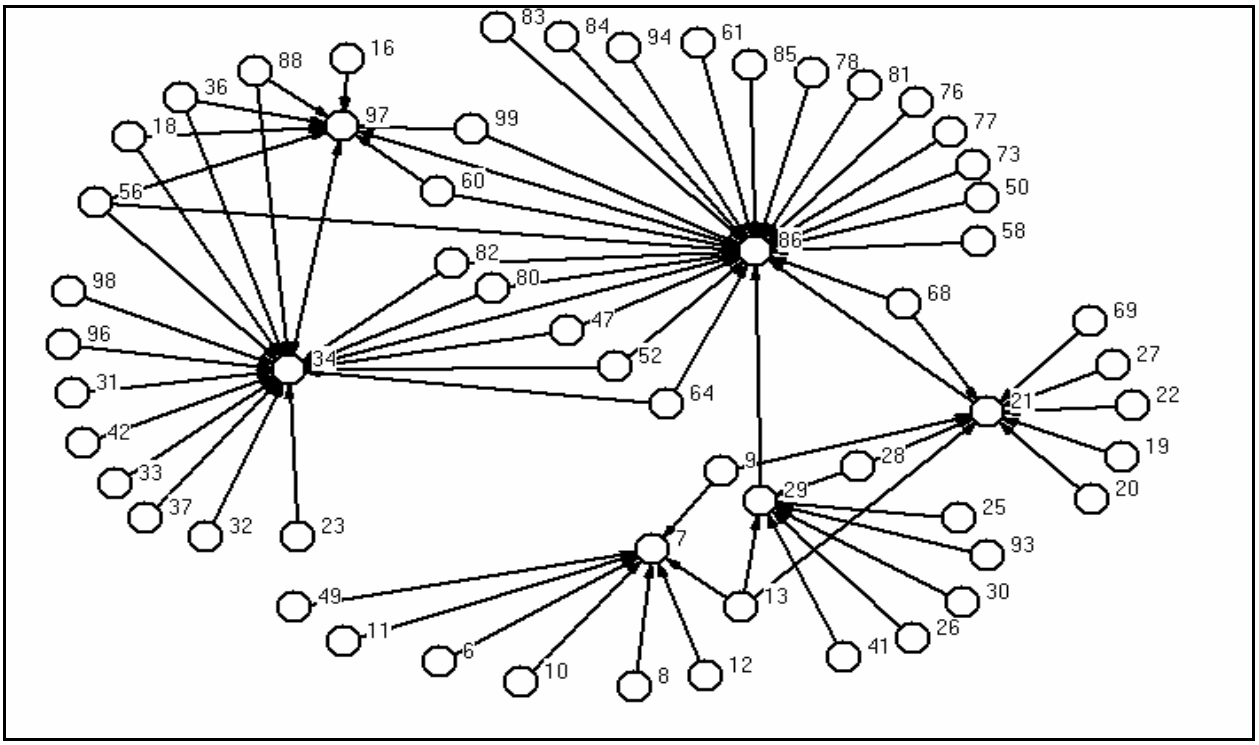

Figure 2. Interaction through key communicators: The friendship pattern

From Figure 2 it can be noticed that there are six key communicators in the village as far as the friendship pattern of communication is concerned. Among these six key communicators respondent no. 86, 34 and 7 has been common for both neighbourhood pattern and friendship pattern of interaction. This indicates that there are more than only spatial factors contributing towards the sociometric status of these key communicators. Moreover, there has been interactions – that too reciprocal – among key communicators to some extent. Also a higher proportion of respondents have been found to be featuring in the interaction process. Several respondents have chosen more than one key communicators for securing information. In doing so, they have acted as the connection (the liaison) between the sub-groups existing within the community. This provides the basis for the study of weak ties (Granovetter, 1973) existing within the community regarding the flow of information on panchayat activities. However, this is beyond the scope of the present study.

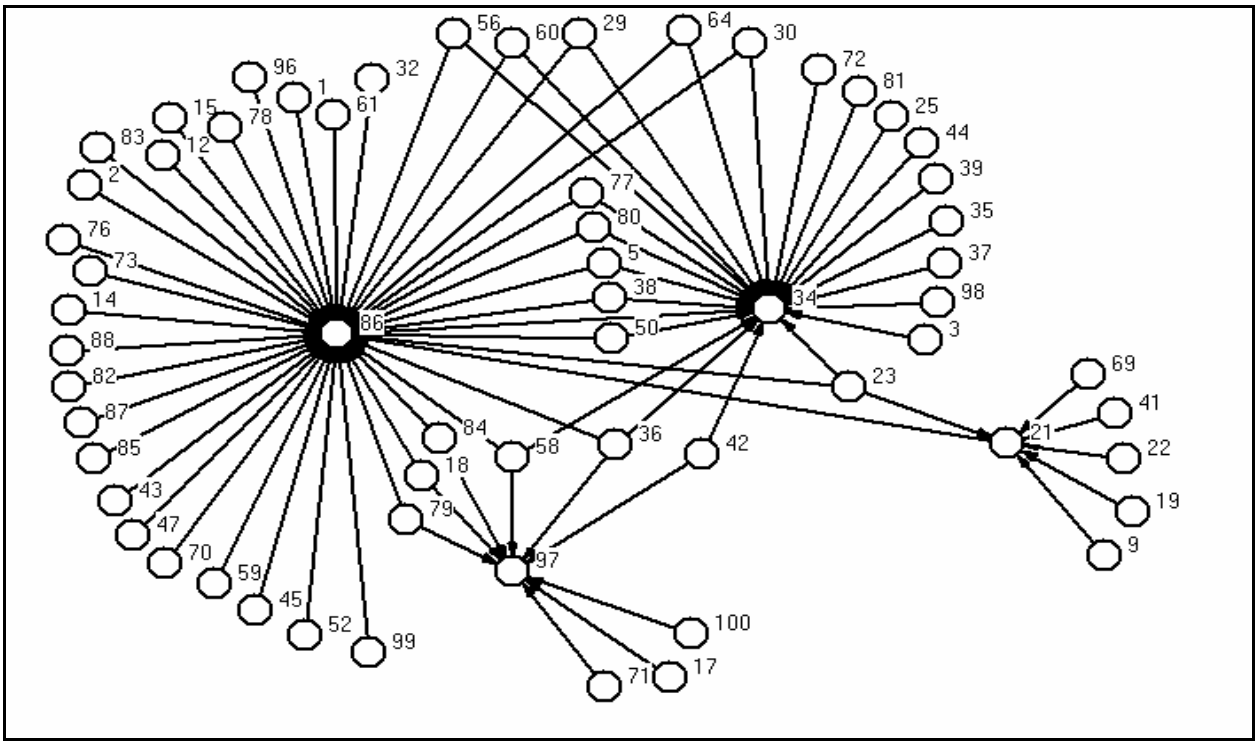

Figure 3. Interaction through key communicators: The discussion group pattern

Figure 3 shows the discussion group pattern of interaction among the respondents with a high degree of communication integration around respondent no. 86 and 34. Similar finings were found by Manohari (2002) while working in the Koya sub-tribe setting in Andhra Pradesh. The number of key communicators has been lower in comparison to neighbourhood and friendship pattern of communication. Respondent no. 97 and 21 have been common key communicators for friendship and discussion group pattern of interactions. Here also, almost extensive reciprocal choices can be found among the key communicators.

From the above three patterns of interaction it can be generalised that –

1. Neighbourhood pattern of interaction shows least dense key communicator network and least dependence of them for seeking information.
2. Friendship group pattern of interaction features higher number of respondents seeking information from more than one key communicator.
3. Discussion group pattern of interaction shows least number of key communicators and highest inter-key communicator interaction.

Therefore, from the present study one can find the differential nature of key communicator network; the nature of communication integration in different pattern of interactions can also be noticed. One can go further to find out the socio-economic, socio-psychological and communication variables associated with these key communicators to understand the process better. The networks have also provided crucial information regarding the path of information flow. Understanding such network and their actors are crucial for two reasons. At first place, to use these paths for the effective spread of information regarding panchayat activities like new

laws, new schemes, minikit distribution, health related campaigns, and other regular activities of the panchayats. Secondly, the capacity building of key communicators can be proved instrumental in smooth and meaningful functioning of grassroot self-governing organiations.

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